

The following account of Bryan Blundell was written following a year's investigation by the Blue Coat School History Society, led by Dr Wainwright from the school's History & Politics Department. It reflects two sides to Blundell's story. To begin with it tells the conventional narrative – of his career as a mariner and his philanthropic contributions to the poor children of Liverpool. In addition, this account also includes another side to his story which has been less well publicised previously – that of his connections to and involvement in the trade in enslaved Africans. This account also highlights that the Blundells and the Blue Coat School were far from unique in Liverpool in having connections to that trade. At the same time, it also highlights that it is simply not true to say that everyone at the time saw slavery as acceptable. There were abolitionists in Britain during Bryan Blundell's lifetime.

Bryan Blundell



Liverpool in 1680, the earliest known image of Liverpool, shows Our Lady and St Nicholas in the left of the picture.

Born in a time of change

Bryan Blundell was born on 30th December 1674 and baptised a little over a week later at the chapel of Our Lady and St Nicholas, overlooking the River Mersey. At that time Liverpool was a small port with a population that had never risen above more than 1,500 inhabitants, where mariners laid offerings at a statue of St Nicholas before setting off to sea aboard their wooden vessels.

However, Blundell was born at a time when Liverpool in particular, and British society in general, were undergoing rapid change in many respects, and these changes would bring many opportunities for men such as Blundell to prosper.

Opportunity was arriving through the development of England's early colonies in the Americas, particularly in Barbados, where sugar had been introduced in the 1640s, and in the Chesapeake Bay colonies of Virginia and Maryland, where a tobacco-based economy had been developing since the first tobacco seeds were brought to Jamestown in the 1610s. Liverpool merchants found their west coast town was well-positioned geographically to take advantage of this colonial trade. They also benefitted significantly from the Navigation Acts of the 1660s that eliminated foreign competition when they ruled that only English ships

should be allowed to carry trade to the English colonies. During Blundell's lifetime, Liverpool also found its position in the northwest to be advantageous during the decades of war that raged with France, when ships trading from London or even Bristol were exposed to greater risk of attack or capture by hostile vessels than those sailing from Liverpool around the north of Ireland.

The aftermath of the Civil War, the Restoration and the events of the Glorious Revolution led to substantial change amongst the elites of English society. In Liverpool, the rising merchant class prospering from the new American trade were able to gain control of the town council from the traditional aristocratic families. This political control allowed them to shape the development of the town in their interests, notably with the creation of the world's first commercially successful "wet" dock in 1715. This in turn enabled the port of Liverpool to load and unload ships within the dock gates irrespective of how the rising and falling tide affected ships out on the river. This innovation allowed Liverpool to overtake the local rival port of Chester and go on to establish itself as one of the leading maritime towns in the country. By 1708 (when Blundell turned 34) the population of Liverpool had quadrupled to about 6,000, and by the time he died in the 1750s the town population had swollen to about 20,000, testimony to the opportunities that trade was offering.

The story of Bryan Blundell is that of a man who grew up in this booming town. As young man he found a sailing career through this burgeoning trade with America, and he went on to become a merchant investing in such voyages, investing a share of his profits in philanthropic efforts such as the Blue Coat Hospital, a school for the orphans to be found in the streets of his rapidly expanding hometown.

Bryan Blundell - Mariner

Blundell followed his father into a career at sea, and maintained a journal which provides us with much valuable information about his life. The story his journal tells is an adventurous one of a rapid rise through the ranks. From around 1687 until 1693 he served as a cabin boy on the *Reserve* (on which ship he took part in the wars in Ireland at the relief of the Siege of Derry) then progressed to be Second Mate and Mate on the *Amety*, before in 1696 taking command of a ship, the *Mulberry*, at only 21 years of age.



Blundell's voyages on these ships involved sailing from Liverpool, collecting dairy products and other goods from Ireland, then sailing to the Americas - almost always to Chesapeake Bay, from where the ship would return with a cargo of tobacco for sale in Liverpool.

Over the years he accumulated wealth, not just from his wages, but through having his own share of the cargo, which he could then trade. By the end of the century he had enough

funds to be able to commission his own vessels to be built, and in 1701 he took command of the *Lever*, a vessel that he himself owned in partnership with three other merchants. He was by this point also owner of smaller vessels that could be used in the Americas to send his crew to multiple destinations simultaneously, thus enabling him to make more purchases more quickly. During the years aboard the *Lever*, he enjoyed further fortune in business, and began to trade more with the Caribbean colonies as well as those in Chesapeake Bay.

His voyages saw him facing many perils. Sailing itself was dangerous given the time of year and the lack of technology. The voyages to America generally set off in October or later months, when rough seas and tempestuous weather offered a real threat to life. This was because they had to arrive in Spring when the previous year's tobacco harvest had had time to dry, but before the waters warmed and the fauna of Chesapeake Bay could eat away at the ships' wooden hulls. The events in Blundell's journal tell of the risk from the weather in the shape of gales and lightning strikes, and other threats such as icebergs and being dashed against rocks at night. In addition to all this, Blundell and his crew had to be wary of other vessels. There was a constant threat of attack by the French, with whom England was at war for almost all of his years at sea. This led to the English ships travelling in convoys of over 100 vessels, protected by at least one Royal Navy man-of-war.

These convoys did not always provide effective protection. Sometimes they became scattered, and in 1706 Blundell and the *Lever* were captured by the French and he spent some time in prison in Normandy. After his return to England, Blundell secured passage to Philadelphia where he had recently commissioned another new ship to be made for him. He commanded this new ship, the *Cleveland*, in the latter years of his career at sea, not only trading with Chesapeake Bay and, increasingly, the Caribbean (where Blundell and his crew even found themselves engaged in gunfights with pirates) but also leading voyages to the Russian port of Archangel, where he was nearly killed in a large fire in 1709.

His journal makes it clear that Blundell was a man of religious faith. There are many references to the benevolence of God who he felt had blessed his life. His religious feelings also shine through in those sections of his journal describing his visits to France and Russia. On both occasions, Blundell's journal shows his careful assessment of how devout the local inhabitants appeared to be in terms of their church attendance.

Although Blundell's maritime career was remarkable, he was not a self-made man who rose up from poverty. As mentioned above, on his father's side he came from a family of sailors, but on his mother's side Bryan Blundell came from a family of means. His maternal grandfather Thomas Preeson had been Bailiff of Liverpool and was the owner of a series of houses next to Liverpool Castle, which became known as Preeson's Row. Bryan Blundell was given something of a headstart in life when he inherited one of these houses from his grandfather when he was only 10 years old. Another important relative appears to have been his uncle William Preeson (another Alderman and Mayor of Liverpool). William Preeson owned not only plantations in Virginia that Blundell sailed to trade with, but also the *Mulberry*, the very ship that gave Blundell his first command. Blundell's cousin Thomas Preeson expanded the family's tobacco holdings in America, and it was with these family businesses that Blundell began and developed his maritime career.

Bryan Blundell – Merchant, Mayor and Philanthropist

In 1714, as he neared his 40th birthday, Blundell “retired from the sea”. He continued to be involved in Liverpool’s maritime trade, but now as a merchant investor rather than as a sailor.

Like many Liverpool businessmen, Blundell derived his income from a range of sources, and fate often intervened to his financial advantage. The year after Blundell retired from the sea, his friend William Clayton died. Clayton, six times MP for Liverpool, dominated the trade in tar, a vital product for enabling wooden ships to be sea-worthy. Clayton bequeathed his tar business to Blundell, who, according to his journal, engaged in the transport of no less than 100,000 barrels of tar in 120 ships from the Americas over the next 30 years. Blundell was clearly able to secure substantial income streams from this source. Records in the National Archives show that by 1740, Blundell’s tar business was in fact supplying the Royal Navy at their important bases at both Deptford and Portsmouth.

Blundell also served two terms as Mayor of Liverpool, in 1721-22 and again in 1728-29. In office, his religious views appear to have shaped his policies, seeking to take action against those “*guilty of excessive drinking, blasphemy, profane swearing and cursing, lewdness, profanation of the Lord’s Day or any other immoral and disorderly practices*”. He introduced a cage and ducking stool with which to hold to account those failing to meet the moral standards he expected.

His religious influences also led Blundell to his involvement in the foundation of the Blue Coat School. From 1696 onwards, Blundell had given £5 each year from his maritime income to be donated to the poor of the town, and a new school for poor children seems to have met with his ideas of Christian charity. In the early 1700s the growing town had welcomed a new church, that of St Peter’s. In 1708 one of the rectors of that church, Rev Robert Stythe had made representation to the mayor and town council for support in “*building a School, for teaching poor children to read, write, etc.*” The council had approved the appeal, and a small patch of ground in the south east of St Peter’s churchyard was dedicated to that purpose.

Blundell was not present at this representation to the council to establish the school, as at that moment in time he was fighting his way through snow and ice in Chesapeake Bay. Nevertheless he appears to have been actively supportive of Stythe, and it was Blundell who provided the initial £35 needed to build a small school in the church grounds, and from that point on, in addition to his donations to the poor, he also donated money to the school each year. By 1714, Blundell had donated over £250 to the school, and clearly felt a personal connection to it, so much so that when Stythe died in 1713, Blundell decided to



“leave off the sea and undertake the care of the school”, assuming the position of Treasurer in 1714, a position he held until near his death, over forty years later.

As Treasurer, Blundell consolidated the school’s finances and expanded the provision it offered, taking it well beyond that offered by most other charity schools in the country. Concerned at seeing students from the school begging in the street, he decided to make the school a boarding school so as to remove them more completely from the problems caused by their parents’ poverty. He secured funds for a complete new building, which was constructed on what is now School Lane by 1718, with separate wings to accommodate boys and girls, although children would not be actually taken in for full provision of food and lodging until the school had built a large enough financial reserve to maintain them.

As the years went by, he successfully pushed to expand the number of students that could attend the school, increasing the pupils on roll from fifty to sixty children in 1726, then to seventy in 1742, until finally, by 1748 there were a hundred students benefiting from his charitable efforts. He also spent years working to secure a formal Charter for the school which was finally obtained in 1740, enabling the school to have trustees, and to receive bequests and other donations more easily. In 1724 the school even added two wings to the rear of the building, containing 36 apartments serving as almshouses and providing support for the adult poor of the town.

Within the school the children were educated from the age of 8 until the age of 14, when the school sought to find them apprenticeships and therefore worthwhile employment. The school provided students with food and lodgings, and a curriculum that combined a strong Christian element alongside physical work for boys and girls such as picking oakum and spinning cotton respectively.

The key to Blundell’s success in erecting and expanding the school was a subscription model. Although Blundell donated substantial sums of his own money to the school (claiming to have given ten percent of his income to the endeavour) what made it really successful was his success in enticing many of Liverpool’s other merchants to become regular donors too. With the new dock enabling trade and profits to increase rapidly, Liverpool’s merchants responded, and an association with the Blue Coat Hospital became not only a mark of someone’s Christian charity, but also of one’s social status, with new subscribers seeking to associate with the leading families of the town.

The Blue Coat was not the first school in Liverpool. There had been schools in the town before, dating back to 1515 when an endowment was left at the church of St Nicholas to maintain a grammar school in the name of one John Crosse. Nor was Liverpool unique in establishing a charity school for their town’s poor at this time. In the 1690s, there were few charity schools in the country, but by 1700 there were 112. By 1723, there were 1,329 charity schools recorded. There were a number of reasons for this explosion of educational provision. In the 1690s the philosopher John Locke had propounded the idea that human character is not fixed, but that instead the human mind is a blank slate or “tabula rasa” at birth, and that it is one’s experiences and upbringing that shape one’s character as an adult. Based on that understanding, the provision of education for children seemed to be much more worthwhile. In towns such as Liverpool, which although expanding, were still

relatively small, the well-to-do merchants lived alongside those in poverty, and a charity school could be seen to offer a chance to shape the moral character of the next generation as industrious workers rather than indolent poor. Moreover, donating money to such a worthy cause would enable the rising merchant class to demonstrate their own religious credentials. The grand school building bore a Latin inscription declaring that it was “dedicated to the promotion of Christian charity and the training of poor boys in the principles of the Anglican Church”, and, when the new school was constructed, a new gallery was also erected in St Peter’s church to accommodate the children from the school allowing the benefactors and their peers to bear witness to the moral improvement of the children of the poor as they *“stand, sitt, kneel and hear divine service and sermons.”*

A further impetus for the development of schools was concern over the religious destiny of the nation. There were concerns that commitment to the Anglican faith was threatened by other Protestant denominations, and there was also an evident threat from Catholicism in the form of the Jacobites – Catholic supporters of the deposed branch of the Stuart dynasty who, after several plots, actually invaded from Scotland in 1715, reaching south as far as Preston, and causing considerable concern in Liverpool.

It is not surprising that a man with Blundell’s religious sympathies would want to be seen to support a school for orphans based on the Anglican faith. Blundell certainly appreciated its value stating- *“It is so useful a charity that I have frequently wished to see as many charity schools as we have churches.”*

Bryan Blundell’s family

In terms of his private life, Bryan Blundell had a complex and quite tragic family tree. He married three times, with one wife dying during one of his times away at sea and another dying of consumption less than six months after their marriage. Between them, he and his wives lost eight children who died at birth or in infancy, and two of his surviving daughters died before their 35th birthday, one whose husband had already died, leaving Blundell to bring up his grandson in his own home.

Blundell’s surviving family formed an important part of his legacy. On Blundell’s death, his son Richard took over as Treasurer of the Blue Coat, followed in turn by his brother Jonathan in 1760. With Jonathan Blundell remaining as Treasurer until 1796, this meant that for 82 years the Blundell family provided leadership of the school’s finances. The school had continued to grow and prosper, and by 1798 there were 327 students in the care of the school.

This then is the conventional tale of Bryan Blundell, a mariner and philanthropist whose religious values led him to spend a considerable amount of his income on good causes, a man who dedicated many years to establishing one of Liverpool’s oldest institutions and, by securing its long-term financial security, played a positive role in the lives of many young scholars.

However, the traditionalist account above does not tell the full history of Bryan Blundell. A more complete history will also look more closely at the sources of his income, to

investigate who was doing the work in the colonies producing the tobacco, sugar and tar which made Blundell's fortune, and will examine other connections between Blundell and forced labour and slavery.

Indentured and enslaved workers in the Americas

Since the start of his maritime career, Blundell's fortunes had, like much of Liverpool, been based on the trade of cash crops from the colonies. Both Caribbean sugar and Chesapeake tobacco needed the supply and maintenance of a large labour force, for both the clearance of land and the labour-intensive production and processing of the cash crop itself. One form of labour in the early years of colonial America was that of indentured servants. These workers entered into contracts to serve a master for a fixed term. Conditions of life under this indenture would vary according to the individuals concerned. Masters had great control over the labourer's lives, including the right to forbid them to marry, and to punish them for bad behaviour, including extending the length of their servitude, especially for attempted escape or becoming pregnant. Indentured labourers could also find themselves sold from one master to another at any time. Bryan Blundell's journal shows that he himself owned and sold indentured servants. On a 1696 voyage to Virginia he wrote that he sold two servants for £44, in 1701-2 in Barbados he "sold my servant, the joiner, for £33" and in Monserrat "also a servant lad for £17:10;1'.

However, indentured labour had decreased dramatically as a proportion of the colonial labour force by the time that Blundell was trading with the Americas. This was due to a number of factors. Firstly the supply of those willing to sign themselves into servitude was dwindling. Fewer workers sought to flee Britain for the New World as the turmoil of the Civil Wars faded into the past and the development of trade offered new work opportunities at home. At the same time, in the American colonies there was less land remaining available to be claimed by servants at the end of their indenture, as larger plantation owners bought up remaining land, and also bought out that of smallholders. Frustration was growing amongst the poorer settlers, unable to afford to buy land for themselves and unable to find employment as paid labourers. With events such as Bacon's Rebellion of 1676 showing the potential for unrest, larger plantation owners were increasingly turning to Africa to solve their labour needs, purchasing enslaved people brought to them by the Royal African Company. To support this, a new legal system regulating chattel slavery was introduced in Barbados in the 1660s. By defining enslaved people as chattels (property) it denied them the basic rights guaranteed under English common law, including the right to life. Owners were free to work their enslaved labourers as they saw fit, and to punish them by whatever means they chose, no matter how violent or cruel, and children born to enslaved parents became slaves themselves by birth. These Barbadian slave codes were replicated across the other American colonies, so that by the time Blundell made his 23 journeys to the Americas to buy tobacco and sugar, most tobacco plantations in Chesapeake Bay used enslaved labour, most sugar produced on Barbados used enslaved labour and enslaved people's lives were subject to the Barbadian slave codes. This continued in the 42 years he sent ships to trade there after retiring from the sea.

There were a minority of plantations that didn't use enslaved labourers but Blundell did not buy tobacco exclusively from individual producers. We know that he sent his crew out to secure whatever produce he could from markets. A very significant amount of the tobacco

he brought back from Virginia and the sugar from the Caribbean will therefore have been harvested and processed by enslaved workers, which kept the prices low enough for Blundell and others like him to make their profits.

Voyages carrying enslaved people

It must be said that the historical record gives no indication that Bryan Blundell was captain of any ship sailing to Africa with the purpose of trading in slaves. His own journeys were two-way affairs between Europe and the Americas, with no evidence of any of his voyages being involved in a “triangular trade” involving Africa. In terms of investing in the trade in enslaved Africans, there is no evidence of this in the years that Blundell was at sea, and moreover, for the first part of Blundell’s maritime career (up to 1699), the London-based Royal African Company held a monopoly on that trade, and Liverpool merchants could gain no legal involvement.

However, there is evidence that he transported enslaved people within the Americas. His own journal describes how in 1702, as captain and part-owner of the *Lever*, he transported as passenger a slaveowner, one Thomas Creasey together with a number of enslaved workers, from Nevis to Virginia. In his journal Blundell used words to describe the enslaved which are now held to be racial slurs, and which indicate his failure to recognise the humanity of those being trafficked on his vessel. The historical record also shows that in 1733, years after he had ceased sailing himself, Blundell’s ship the *Jonathan* was directly involved in trading slaves between the American colonies. In that year the *Jonathan* transported 40 enslaved people from Jamaica to the Lower James River in Chesapeake Bay where 39 were disembarked. Bryan Blundell is named as the sole investor in this voyage.

Some confusion appears to have arisen about Blundell’s direct involvement in the buying and selling of people to be used as slaves. This confusion may hinge on the issue of distinguishing between Blundell’s involvement up to the age of 40 when he was a sailor himself, and his involvement for the following forty years, not as a sailor, but as a merchant, when he did invest in, and profit from, the forced movement of people from Africa to the Americas.

A merchant involved in the trade in enslaved people

Blundell had retired from going to sea himself in 1714 following three years of disappointing markets for sale of products from Barbados. While he was in Liverpool securing financial subscribers for the Blue Coat Hospital and arranging the construction of the new school building, he continued to be a merchant. As he put it in his journal “*At my leaving off going to sea I was concerned in several ships.*”

As explained above, Blundell inherited the tar business of his friend William Clayton, but together with his business partners, he continued to invest in the kind of voyages he had once sailed on. His journal is less helpful to our understanding of his career as a merchant than his career as a sailor. Where each of his voyages is covered in some detail, he provides only overview of his investments. Nevertheless, despite those histories that claim Blundell was not involved in the trade in enslaved Africans, Blundell’s own journal makes it clear that

in 1717, the year when building work was fully underway on the new school building for the Blue Coat, he made a conscious decision to seek profits from trading in the enslavement of others. After their vessel the *Cleiveland* returned from the Americas that year via Lisbon, he and his three business partners had actually made a loss on their investment. Given the poor returns from their traditional markets that had been happening over the preceding several years, Blundell and his partners appear to have made a strategic decision to move into slave trading. As occurred so many times in his life, a new opportunity arose, and Blundell sought to take advantage of it. The previous year, the East India Company had reversed decades of policy by granting licenses for six vessels to trade slaves from Madagascar to the American colonies. Blundell and partners decided to make the most of this market opportunity. Traditionally it had proven cheaper to purchase enslaved people from Madagascar than from West Africa. In becoming the recipients of only a small number of licences granted by the East India Company in 1717 Blundell and his partners stood to make a much greater profit than if they had entered the trade through the more conventional slaving markets of West Africa.

"Arrived at Lisbon the beginning of May to very bad markets. Sailed from thence the 21st May 1717 and arrived at Liverpool 19th June with a few pipes of wine and some cork wood. Makes a very bad voyage insomuch that we lose £800 by the voyage, which is each of us £200 by his ¼ which is so discouraging that we put the ship in dock for some months and then consulted and determined her to go to the Madagasca for slaves, in order to which we procured us a licence from the East India Company, which cost us £25.

... Was in hopes to get 500 slaves - the Elizabeth being a larger ship, I think bought 600...."

Journal of Bryan Blundell

In the end, Blundell's first attempt to engage directly in the purchase and sale of enslaved people ended in failure, with the *Cleiveland* lost at sea off the coast of Madagascar on the way to *"the place they designed to slave at."* This first voyage of a Blundell ship actively seeking to purchase people and sell them into enslavement in America was of course, the same year that Blundell was opening the new building for the Blue Coat Hospital school, dedicating it to the service of God.

Some accounts have sought to minimise Blundell's direct involvement in the trade in enslaved people by saying that although he made this investment in 1717-18, it failed to secure the desired outcome, and suggesting that he never made any further attempts to be involved in the trade. However, it is made clear by his own journal and from the maritime records which lie behind the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, that he and his partners were not, in fact, deterred by the fate of the *Cleiveland* and that in reality he went on to make substantial investments in, and profits from, the trade in selling enslaved people across the Atlantic.

In his journal, Blundell wrote that, in addition to his investments in ships in the tar trade, he also had investments in several ships involved in the "Guinea and West India trades". Some of the vessels he named in his journal can be cross-referenced with entries in the international slave trade database, where Bryan Blundell is also named as an investor. The

table below indicates the scale of Blundell's direct involvement in slave trading that are known about so far.

Year	Vessel name	African port visited	Destination	Number of enslaved Africans who began the voyage	Number who arrived at destination
1722	Martha	unknown	Nevis	142	114
1724	Jane and Ellen	unknown	Nevis	153	131
1727	Tarleton	unknown	Barbados	273	236
1748	Duke of Cumberland	unknown	St Kitts	240	197
1750	Duke of Cumberland	Gambia	Jamaica	240	197
1752	Duke of Cumberland	Bonny (Nigeria)	Barbados	459	393
1752	Elizabeth	Gambia	Virginia	150	130
1753	Duke of Cumberland	Bonny (Nigeria)	Jamaica	429	350
1755	Elizabeth	Bonny (Nigeria)	Barbados	270	231
1755	Duke of Cumberland	Bonny (Nigeria)	Jamaica	355	290

These voyages alone suggest a total of 2,711 people were purchased and taken aboard Bryan Blundell's ships to be sold into slavery.

442 of these people did not survive the journey on Blundell's ships

Bryan Blundell's family's involvement in the trade in enslaved people

Bryan Blundell can be identified as a direct investor in ten slave trading voyages on the international Slave Trade Database. However, his children and grandchildren continued that involvement and took it to another level. There are over one hundred other entries for the years 1721-1784 in which at least one member of the Blundell family is listed as owner for a slaving voyage of a ship registered in Liverpool.

It was very much a family business. The vessel *Mary* for example, took over 560 people into slavery in 1760. That voyage had six investors. Four of them were Blundell's sons Bryan Jr, Richard, William and Jonathan. The other two investors in this ship were Blundell's daughter Elizabeth and his grandson from his first marriage, Samuel Shaw. There was even a vessel named the *Blundell* which was invested in by the family and delivered a further 2,275 people into enslavement in the Americas during Bryan Blundell's lifetime and a further 1,096 before it was shipwrecked in 1773 with the loss of 443 further enslaved Africans and 40 crew.

Blundell's son Jonathan was also someone who owned enslaved people in Liverpool. The baptismal register of St Peter's Church features a "Thomas Mr Jon' Blundell's Negro About 30 Y' Old Baptiz'd 20 April 1767" while Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser contained an advertisement on 29 October 1773 for Thomas Gray a "runaway Negro Man" about 25 years old, for whose return Jonathan Blundell was offering two guineas reward.

Jonathan Blundell's son Jonathan Jr also became made profits through trading in slaves. In the year 1779, whilst Jonathan Blundell Sr was Blue Coat's Treasurer, Jonathan Blundell Jr's firm Rainford, Blundell and Rainford imported 10% of all the slaves brought to Jamaica.

Lobbying to protect the trade in enslaved Africans

To return to Bryan Blundell himself, his involvement in the trade in enslaved people was more substantial still than just being a merchant. The former mayor was also involved politically in attempts to support and protect the trade. In November 1739, when the so-called "War of Jenkins' Ear" broke out with Spain Bryan Blundell lobbied the king to take action to protect the trade. As Blundell knew from his own sailing career, any years of conflict at sea posed a threat to any maritime trade between the belligerent nations. The outbreak of war represented a threat not only to the South Sea Company, who held the monopoly of selling enslaved Africans to the Spanish colonies in the Americas, but also to others such as the Blundell family, engaged in supplying enslaved people to Caribbean islands such as Jamaica. Blundell therefore signed his name as one of the "Traders to Africa" requesting that the king send warships to protect the trade of the "great Numbers of Negroes" transported to the American plantations, and that such ships be relieved by fresh warships every three or four months.

212. THE TRADERS TO AFRICA TO THE KING.¹

November 7, 1739.

To the King's most Excellent Majesty, The humble Peition of the Traders of London, Bristol, and Liverpoole, to the Coast of Africa.

Sheweth, That the trade of your Majesty's Subjects to that Coast is of the greatest Importance to this Kingdom as well in regard of the great Quantity of Manufactures and other goods annually exported thither as in respect of the great Numbers of Negroes annually Imported into your Majesty's Plantations in America therefrom, and there being Employed at such Plantations in the producing of Sugar and other Commodities.

That your Petitioners being apprehensive, unless some of your Majesty's Ships of War be constantly stationed on the Coast of Africa That his Catholick Majesty, or his Subjects or any other persons under Spanish Commissions may send Ships of War, or Privateers to cruize on the Ships and Vessels of your Majesty's Subjects Trading on that Coast.

Therefore, your Petitioners most humbly beseech your Majesty will be Graciously pleas'd to give directions that a Sufficient Number of Ships of War may be ordered on this Service And that such Ships be releived every three or four Months by a like Number during the apprehension or continuance of a Rupture with Spain or any other Nation.

R. Armitage
(Mayor of
Liverpool)

R. Gildart
Geo. Norton
Foster Cunliffe
Sam'l Powell
John Hardman
Sam'l Ogden
Thos. Cockshutt
Bryan Blundell
Hen: Trafford
In: Fon [?] Gildart
Thos: Steel
Chas. Robert
Arthur Heywood
Jno. Goodwin

R. Cawband
Tho. Vardon
W. Jeffries
(Mayor of
Bristol)
Jos. Jeffries
Jas. Danning
Lyonel Lyde
Math. Day
St. Cluterbuck
B. Weeks
Rd. Lougher
Mich. Becher
Henry Combe
Jno. Combe
Mich'l Pope
Sam'l Davies

Richd. Henville
John Love
Sam. Bonham
Geo. Tryer
Jas. Pearse
Chas. Pole
Hen. Lascelles
Tho. Hull
Tho. Hill
Nath. Basnet
Edwin Somers
Thos. Truman
Jam. Buchanan
Wm. Love [Lone?]
Thos. Lengard[good?]
David Crichton
Thos: Heberts

It appears that the Blundell family maintained this involvement in the promotion of the trade in enslaved people right through to the final years of his life. In 1752, when Blundell was 78 years old, one Bryan Blundell is listed as a founding member of the Liverpool section

of the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, an organisation established not directly to make profit itself, but to expedite the processes that generated the profits for private traders. This new organisation took over three former roles of the Royal African Company. Firstly, it was to maintain the series of forts on the coast of West Africa which were pivotal to the process of forced transport across the Atlantic, and to ensure these forts were kept armed and flying the British flag as a deterrent to rival nations who might wish to encroach on British trade. Secondly, it was to ensure the forts were kept supplied with enslaved people which private merchants could then buy to sell in the Americas. Thirdly, the company were to ensure the maintenance of good relations with the local African communities, such as by paying rent, giving presents, and participating in local courts. Members of the Blundell family each paid 40 shillings a year to be members of this company to facilitate the trade in enslaved Africans

A LIST of the Company of Merchants trading to Africa,
(Established by an Act of Parliament, pass in the 23d Year of his present Majesty,
entitled, An Act for extending and improving the Trade to AFRICA) belong-
ing to Liverpool, June 24, 1752.

Amitage Robert	Craven Charles	Hesketh Robert	Pole William
Atherton John	Clayton John	Hughes Richard	Parker John
Ashton John	Crompton John	Hardwar Henry	Rowe William
Bostock John	Clews George	Higgison William	Reed Samuel
Bulkeley William	Chalmar Thomas	Hallhead Robert	Strong Matthew
Blundell Jonathan	Davis Joseph	Hughes John Capt.	Shaw Samuel
Backhouse John	Deane Edward	Kendall Thomas	Savage Richard
Blundell Bryan	Dobb William	Knight John	Secl Thomas
Blundell Richard	Dunbar Thomas	Leatherbarrow Th.	Strong John
Blackburn John	Earl Ralph	Laidler George	Smith Samuel
Bradley George	Eddie David	Lee Pierce	Secl Robert
Brooks John	Ellams Elliott	Lowndes Edward	Smith Rob. Broad-
Benfon William	Forbes Edward	Lowndes Charles	street, Lonsou-
Ball Thomas	Farmer Joseph	Mears Thomas	Tarleton John
Bridge Edward	Ford Richard	Mancity Joseph	Townsend Henry
Blundell William	Fletcher Potter	Nicholas Richard	Townsend Richd.
Brooks Joseph	Gildart Richard	Nicholson John	Trafford Edward
Brooks Jonathan	Goodwin William	Ogden Samuel	Tarleton John
Bird Joseph	Goore Charles	Ogden Edmund	Unworth Levinus
Crowder Thomas	Gorrell John	Oldham Isaac	Williamson Wm.
Crosbie James	Gildart James	Okill John	Whyrell Christo.
Cunliffe Foster	Gordon James	Pritchard Owen	Whalley William
Cunliffe Ellis	Goodwin John	Parr John	White Hen. Lane.
Cunliffe Robert	Hardman John	Parr Edward	Williamson John
Campbell George	Heywood Arthur	Pardoe James	
Clay Robert	Heywood Benja.	Penket William	Total 101.

N. B. *There are One Hundred and thirty-five Merchants free of the African Company in London and One Hundred and fifty-seven in Bristol, whereas their Trade to Africa is not so extensive as the Merchants of Liverpool.*

Social context of the time

It is important to note that the Blundell family were not alone in leading lives that combined charity and exploitation. Many of the Liverpool merchants who were the original subscribers that funded the new school in 1717 were also heavily involved in the economy of transatlantic slavery. Individuals such as Richard Gildart, William Clayton, John Blackburne, John Earle, Edward Tarleton, Richard Norris, Foster Cunliffe and others had made multiple investments in voyages that purchased and sold enslaved people from Africa. When Blundell wrote his petition to the king in 1739, so too did other individuals who had subscribed money to the Blue Coat Hospital back in 1717. Richard Gildart's name appears, as does Foster Cunliffe. Familiar names from the lists of Blue Coat subscribers also appear

on the list of Merchants Trading with Africa in 1752. Richard Gildart was even chosen to be one of the nine-man committee that led this organisation in 1758.

The practice of financial support for the school deriving from families whose incomes included revenue from slavery continued through the decades. Of the fifty trustees to the school in 1785, the majority were investors in enterprises to sell people into slavery or were otherwise involved in the slave economy. This connection continued right through to the nineteenth century. George Brown, an orphan who was taken in by the school in 1765 aged 8, finished his schooling with an apprenticeship at sea. From this start, he went onto become the captain of a slave ship, and then a merchant in the slave trade into the early 1800s, making substantial financial donations to the school, before becoming Treasurer to the school in 1809.

This history of connections to the slavery-based economy is not unique to the Blue Coat as an institution. Connections to the economy of transatlantic slavery were endemic in the port of Liverpool. As the town expanded, its merchants developed their family fortunes, with many of them finding profit from direct investment in the trade in enslaved people or in the goods produced by enslaved workers. These fortunes then contributed to the donations and investments that shaped much of the growth of the town. Not only commercial institutions such as the emerging system of banks and insurance companies, but also other philanthropic institutions such as the Liverpool Infirmary, Liverpool Dispensary and Liverpool Royal Institution also received funding from merchants whose incomes derived at least in part from the profits of slavery. Lower down the social order, workers found employment in a range of associated trades, ensuring that many, many of Liverpool's citizens were connected to the slavery-based economy.

However, despite these widespread connections, it is also important to be aware that it is simply not true to assume that all contemporary attitudes were supportive of this situation. Even before Bryan Blundell first went to sea, members of the Quaker community had delivered sermons against slavery, and individual sugar merchants such as Thomas Tryon, shocked by the conditions experienced by enslaved people in Barbados in the 1660s, had already published tracts criticizing the practice. During Bryan Blundell's time as a merchant trading in enslaved people, the Quakers ruled that "slavery is not a Commendable nor allowed Practice" and individuals like Benjamin Lay agitated for abolition of the trade. In Liverpool itself, during the time that Jonathan Blundell was Treasurer of the school and investing in slave trading voyages, fellow Liverpudlian Edward Rushton had become outraged at the conditions endured by enslaved people aboard ship, and became a prolific Liverpool-based abolitionist.

In conclusion, the evidence available to date suggests that

- Blundell was not the captain of a slave-trading ship
- Blundell derived income from trading tobacco and sugar and, after 1714, tar.
- Blundell did not trade in enslaved persons before 1709
- Blundell did trade in indentured servants
- It is extremely likely that Blundell profited from slave labour in the production of tobacco, sugar and tar.

- Blundell did trade in enslaved people
- Blundell lobbied for the wider trade in enslaved Africans
- Blundell was a leading member of an organisation facilitating the wider trade
- Blundell established a dynasty that not only traded in enslaved people but also owned enslaved people in Liverpool.
- The Blundell family were not alone. Involvement in the slavery-based economy was endemic in Georgian Liverpool
- The same people who abused people through slavery saw themselves as good Christians and philanthropists– blind to the rights of people different to themselves
- There were other people at the time who condemned the existence of slavery, and who were already active abolitionists